

Developing a Communications Plan for a Travel Agency

Hedman, Ida

2015 Leppävaara

Laurea University of Applied Sciences
Laurea Leppävaara

Developing a Communications Plan for a Travel Agency

Ida Hedman
Degree Programme in Service Management
Bachelor's Thesis
September, 2015

Hedman, Ida

Developing a Communications Plan for a Travel Agency

| | | | |
|------|------|-------|----|
| Year | 2015 | Pages | 28 |
|------|------|-------|----|

Communication today is more demanding than ever, the fast pace that communication has taken with the modern technology and the rising awareness of customers, puts high demands on communication for travel agencies. Customers are becoming more aware of social and environmental issues, which affect their behaviour, while excellent service still remains one of the most important criteria for choosing a service provider.

This thesis follows the process of developing a communications plan for a travel agency in today's demanding settings. With the customer as the focus the thesis outlines how communication is a part of everyday business, with a specific focus on the different social media channels in marketing. The purpose of the thesis was to develop a plan that would support the organisational goals, with the aim for the travel agency to grow.

Conversation, observation and benchmarking were used to assess the current state of communication in the company. A few service design methods, such as customer journey and personas, were taken into use in the development process, in order to get a throughout picture of what the customer expects from the agency. The staff of the travel agency was strongly involved in the development process, with constant communication and brainstorming sessions it was possible to develop a plan that best fits the staff in their everyday work. It was important throughout the process to create a plan that would be of most use to the staff, and easily integrated in their everyday procedures.

The final plan strongly focuses on internal communication, with an idea of making it as smooth as possible, and in this way being a corner stone for all the communication in the travel agency. The plan also gives guidelines for marketing; defining target groups, channels, responsibilities and a timeline. Social media channels are focused strongly on, since they are of big importance in today's marketing. Practical examples for marketing and communications are given in the plan, as are clear responsibilities and job descriptions for the staff.

The timeframe of the development process did not make it possible for a proper assessment of the communication to be shown in the thesis. Instead the communications plan clearly outlines goals for the communication, and gives tools for assessment. The development process is assessed by the management and staff of the travel agency, and they were content with the results and found the plan both helpful in their everyday work and beneficial to the company.

Keywords: Communication, communications plan, marketing, travel industry

Hedman, Ida

Viestintäsuunnitelman Kehittäminen Matkatoimistolle

| | | | |
|-------|------|-----------|----|
| Vuosi | 2015 | Sivumäärä | 28 |
|-------|------|-----------|----|

Viestintä tänä päivänä on vaativampaa kuin koskaan ennen. Viestinnän nopeatempoisuus, nykypäivän teknologia ja asiakkaiden kasvava tietoisuus ympäristöstään luovat haasteita matkatoimistoille viestinnässään ja markkinoinnissaan. NykYTEknologian on tuonut palvelualoille omat paineensa; suuri tietomäärä on kasvattanut ihmisten halua valita palveluita, jotka tukevat ympäristö sekä ekologisesti että sosiaalisesti. Tämän lisäksi palvelun laatu koetaan entistä vahvempana tekijänä palveluntarjoajaa valittaessa.

Tässä opinnäytetyössä seurataan viestintäsuunnitelman kehittämistä matkatoimistolle. Tämä opinnäytetyö keskittyy viestintään ja sen eri vaikutusalueisiin yrityksen jokapäiväisissä toimissa, silti pitäen asiakkaan keskiössä. Painopisteenä viestinnän suunnittelussa on annettu eri sosiaalisen median kanaville markkinoinnissa. Viestintäsuunnitelma on luotu tukemaan yrityksen tavoitetta kasvattaa asiakasmääräänsä.

Menetelminä viestinnän suunnittelussa käytettiin keskustelua, havainnointia ja vertailua. Näiden menetelmien pohjalta saatiin selville viestinnän nykytila, sekä selvitettiin mahdollisia puutteita viestinnässä. Palvelumuotoilumenetelmiä, kuten palvelupolku ja persoonat, otettiin käyttöön jotta suunnitteluprosessissa saataisiin kattava kuva asiakkaiden tarpeista. Matkatoimiston henkilökunta sekä johtoporras olivat jatkuvasti mukana viestinnän kehittämisessä niin keskusteluiden kuin ideariihien kautta. Näin saatiin toteutettua viestintäsuunnitelma, joka parhaiten sopii yrityksen toimiin ja tukee henkilökuntaa heidän jokapäiväisissä tehtävissään, unohtamatta asiakkaita.

Lopullinen viestintäsuunnitelma keskittyy vahvasti sisäiseen viestintään ja sen eri prosesseihin. Ajatuksena oli, että toimiva sisäinen viestintä, toimisi kaiken viestinnän pohjana, ja näin tukisi parhaiten yrityksen tavoitteiden saavuttamista. Suunnitelma sisältää myös konkreettisia ohjeita markkinointiin, määritelmät kohderyhmille, kanaville sekä vastuualueille, ja aikataulun viestinnälle. Erityisen suuren huomion suunnitelmassa ovat saaneet eri sosiaalisen median kanavat, sekä niiden käyttötarkoitukset. Konkreettiset esimerkit henkilökunnalle niin viestintään että markkinointiin ja selkeät työnkuvat ovat myös lueteltu suunnitelmassa.

Viestintäsuunnitelma tehtiin tiukalla aikataululla, minkä takia tähän opinnäytetyöhön ei ole pystytty liittämään kattavaa arviointia viestinnän vaikutuksesta yrityksen toimiin. Viestintäsuunnitelmasta löytyy sen sijaan tarkasti määritellyt tavoitteet, sekä työkalut viestinnän arviointiin. Itse kehitysprosessin arvioi matkatoimiston henkilökunta ja johto, jotka olivat hyvin tyytyväisiä tehtyyn suunnitelmaan.

Avainsanat: Viestintä, viestintäsuunnitelma, markkinointi, matkailuala

Table of contents

| | | |
|---|---|----|
| 1 | Introduction | 6 |
| 2 | Business environment Brazilian Experience | 7 |
| | 2.1 Staff and working environment | 8 |
| | 2.2 Target group | 9 |
| | 2.3 The travel industry today | 9 |
| 3 | Methods for developing communication | 10 |
| | 3.1 Insights to ideas | 12 |
| | 3.2 Assessing communication | 14 |
| 4 | Developing a communications plan for Brazilian Experience | 14 |
| | 4.1 Preparation and planning | 15 |
| | 4.2 Creating the communications plan..... | 16 |
| | 4.3 Determination of organisational goals..... | 17 |
| | 4.4 Organisational goals to the communications plan..... | 19 |
| 5 | Conclusion | 21 |
| | References | 23 |
| | Appendices | 26 |

1 Introduction

Communication is such a basic action we often forget about it altogether, whether it is signaling a turn or saying hi; we are in constant communication with our surroundings. Technology has made communication even easier than before, no matter where you are you can quickly snap a picture and share it with not only your friends and family but followers. Today's communication is full of both opportunities and demands, with everyone having a chance of being heard, being found from the midst of choices can be difficult.

Planning communication in these settings is demanding, but also rewarding. It makes one take a closer look at actions, actually get to know the customers and really makes one think of what is needed in order to achieve set goals. Having the world at your feet, makes you realize you do not need the world, you need a certain group of people who connects with you and your ideologies. That is what communication is all about, is it not? To connect.

The purpose of this thesis was to make a communications plan for a travel agency offering educational travel. The aim of the communications plan is to connect with the right group of people, to attract new customers and to strengthen the bond with old ones. This was done through a close look at the internal and external functions of the company, with a special focus on internal communication in order to achieve the best possible results. During a three month internship I worked in close collaboration with the travel agency, to get a look on both the inside and outside, in order to create a plan as useful as possible for the company and its needs.

To give an insight into who the thesis was commissioned by, and with what purposes, the thesis begins with an introduction to the travel agency and its business environment. The chapter also takes a look at the main target group the company has, and at the demands of the travelling business today; international experience becoming more valuable, volunteering and studying abroad are getting more and more popular.

The third section reflects the theoretical framework of making a communications plan, and showcases tools from the analysis of the current state to the assessment of the output. The theoretical framework was built up using literature written around the area, with a strong focus on communication in today's connected world. As the main methods during the development process were used conversation, benchmarking and observation, which made it possible to make a relevant plan that focuses on the needs of the company. The plan was made in a constant collaboration with the staff and management, and aims to reflect the agency's philosophies and ideologies. The idea was not to make a perfect communications plan, but to

make a plan perfect for the company and its way of working. This is why some service design methods were taken into use, such as customer journey and personas, which are briefly presented in the chapter.

In the fourth section the development process of the plan is outlined from the writer's perspective and tells what guided the writer throughout the development process. The idea being to make a plan that would reflect the ideology of the company, the section also has an assessment of the work from the staff's and management's points of views. The section gives the reader a chance to follow the process of the making of a communications plan for a small company and clearly outlines the factors behind the development. The actual plan can be viewed in the first appendix as a table of contents. Due to the nature of the business, the complete plan has not been published for the public.

The last section concludes the thesis and critically reflects the process of planning the communication for the travel agency. It also takes a look at the main influencers of the development process; viewing both academic literature that affected the progress as well as the customers, staff and surroundings of the company. As only appropriate, when one door closes the next one opens - the last chapter also takes a look at the future.

2 Business environment Brazilian Experience

In this section you will get to know Brazilian Experience, the company for whom the thesis was made for. You will be introduced to the philosophy that guides Brazilian Experience and get familiar with the working environment and staff roles in the company. The section ends with a clarification of the main target group Brazilian Experience has and a short look at the travelling business in general.

Brazilian Experience is an organisation founded in 2009 by Rafaela Rolim, and offers cultural exchange, education and tourism. The organisation was founded because of a strong belief in that living abroad gives an opportunity for personal growth, deeper cultural understanding and inspires respect for both others and yourself. Brazilian Experience's mission is to provide support for exchange students coming to Brazil. (Brazilian Experience 2015).

Brazilian Experience offers several different programs for students wanting to come to Brazil. The programs Brazilian Experience offers include volunteering, teaching, interning, study tours, service-learning and a high-school program. The programs have focus points in several different professional areas ranging from business to environmental planning. (Brazilian Experience 2015.)

Brazilian Experience offers to find placements for students, help them while they are in Brazil and to make sure the exchange students have a great time in Brazil. The company's main office is in Curitiba, but it operates also in Florianópolis and Rio de Janeiro. The company provides support and personalized services for both individuals and groups coming to Brazil. (Brazilian Experience 2015.)

2.1 Staff and working environment

Brazilian Experience is a small company where the owner acts both as CEO and face of the company. The owner being behind the philosophy of the company, she is a strong figure and has a strong impact in all the functions of the company. At the office works one assistant and one communications personnel daily with the owner. On top of this there is an accounts and legal person who mostly works remotely.

The working environment is like a family, where one feels safe and welcome. Rolim is open for ideas, suggestions and critic. The open office gives everyone space to work in peace, but also works as a mind storming space for new ideas and better ways to function. There is a strong desire to always do better, which makes Brazilian Experience a company that is constantly evolving and finding new ways to perform daily tasks.

The goal for Brazilian Experience is to function as a safe base for incoming customers and be able to help whenever needed. This requires a strong team that is able to communicate and work together in any given situation. Brazilian Experience has managed this feeling well and is both from the inside and outside an easily approached business that makes one feel welcome - both as a customer and an employee.

During the time of developing the communication at Brazilian Experience there were a lot of changes in the staff, which had its impact on all the daily procedures; whether it was answering e-mails, doing research or updating the social media channels. Luckily the team stayed strong and the staff proved to be a well-functioning group of people who survived even the hectic times. The staff changes had its effect on compiling the communications plan (Attachment 1), which made it better and gave a chance for it to be implemented properly.

Brazilian Experience is in a transition stage, with an aim to grow as a company. The growing is already happening with the expansion of stakeholders and growing numbers of customers coming from current stakeholders. The transition will require changes in the way daily procedures in the company is handled as well as in staff responsibilities. With a strong vision Brazilian Experience is already embracing the change and in its own open style keeping up with the changes in the environment.

2.2 Target group

Brazilian Experience aims to attract students from all over the world, both individual customers for volunteering and internship programs and groups for different faculty led programs. The main flow of the customers come through contracts with governmental institutions and universities, e.g. Cimo, this means big target groups for Brazilian Experience are different universities and institutions. A minor target group is individual customers who until now have not been paid almost any attention to.

The launch of the new website will redirect the emphasis on the two target groups. The main target will remain universities and governmental institutions, since they are more profitable and less time consuming than individual customers. The new website is designed to make it easier for individual customers to enrol to the different programs Brazilian Experience offers, which means they will be paid more attention to than before. The marketing will focus on inspiring people to travel and face new cultures, with a clear separation in strategies for different target groups.

The usual customers Brazilian Experience has are students with an age range from 20 to 30. All the customers share more or less a desire to meet new cultures, travel and experience the world. Brazilian Experience's programs are customized in a way that allow both experienced world roamers and first time travellers to get a chance to come to Brazil and fulfil their dreams. Brazilian Experience's purpose is to help people fulfil their dreams, so people who dream of travelling, experiencing Brazil and gaining professional experience abroad, are target customers for Brazilian Experience.

2.3 The travel industry today

The travel industry is a highly competitive field, especially with the wide range of choices the online world today provides. Loyal customers are hard, even impossible to find, which is why travel agencies need to clearly know what their customers want and be able, not only to deliver it but primarily to be found in the midst of choices. (Criteo 2015.) Especially volunteering and studying abroad is becoming more and more popular, which can be seen solely by looking into a university's webpage: international experience is most commonly highlighted already on the front page.

For customers the problem is to choose which company to stick with (Lonely Planet 2010, 9), for businesses the challenge is how to be seen and chosen. Customers look for reliable companies whom to travel with, worthwhile causes to put their time into and life changing expe-

periences to encounter. Engaging the local communities in a sustainable way has become one of the main selling points when it comes to volunteering, the Lonely Planet Volunteering -guide (2010, 9) states: “there are plenty of organisations that are not meeting or responding to local needs, not working in proper partnerships with host communities and certainly not working towards sustainable solutions.”

Customers today are vary of their choices and want to know where their time and money is going. For a travel company this means the need to be see-through in its processes (Criteo 2015) and knowing who they partner with. Making sure a travel agency does not drown in the competition requires, being on a constant lookout for trends, staying loyal to the own brand and valuing partnerships.

3 Methods for developing communication

The theoretical framework in this thesis focuses on areas that play a key role in the development of the communications plan. Insights and inspiration used for creating the communications plan involved benchmarking, conversation, mind mapping, customer journey and observation. These tools worked for assessing the current stage of communication as well as for laying the base for the plan to be made. Communication will be viewed in this chapter for parts that are relevant for the process of making a communications plan for a travel agency.

A company is in constant communication with its surroundings (Isohookana 2007, 9), it could even be argued there is no company without communication. With every other part of a company's functions planned, so should communication be; a communication plan functions as a guideline for staff members and management and should be clearly written in order for everyone to fully understand its contents and reasons behind them. Firstly though, it should be remembered when talking about communication, is that different people receive and interpret messages in different ways, especially in a multicultural environment messages can be unclear because of cultural differences. Which is why, a communications plan should be made with the people who will use it in mind; beliefs, attitudes and values of receivers should be considered in order to achieve a plan that functions for the benefit of everyone in the organisation. (Deveraux Ferguson 1999, 130, 159).

A communications plan simply consists of mutual rules that help achieve the goals of the organisation. It should be remembered that even without a plan communication always has a goal, but when well-planned communication becomes more focused and efficient for an industry. The organisational goals and the goals of the communication go hand in hand, support each other, but do not rule each other out and should both be able function on their own.

(Juholin 2009, 67-69, 72.) Åberg (2000, 227) says that a communications plan should be made to identify, not the organisational goals but, the strategies to achieve these goals.

Before writing the actual communications plan there should always be an analysis of the current state of the communication in the organisation (Korhonen & Rajala 2011, 96), in order to clearly see what is functioning and what the communication brings to the company. For Brazilian Experience this was made through benchmarking, observation and conversation. Benchmarking was chosen for the analysis because it helped to give an objective viewpoint to the communication and helped later on with pointing out differences and coming up with development ideas. Observation and conversation helped in determining what would be beneficial for Brazilian Experience.

Benchmarking is a method that bases on the interest of understanding how others function and thrive. Benchmarking often focuses on how successful companies operate and aims to understand why they are successful and how their approaches could be used in one's own business. Benchmarking requires a systemic approach where it is crucial to know what is being observed, the results need to be critically studied and then applied in a creative and functioning way to one's own business (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2010, 163-164.) Benchmarking desires to develop a company's competitive position through comparison to others, in a way to pinpoint differences, and allowing to see the organisation's way of functioning in a broader context. Observation is a key function in benchmarking and several other methods, as well as a method in itself.

Observation has been defined as a "systematic description of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the social setting chosen for study" (Marshall & Rossman 1989, 79), as well as a method that informs if humans behave the way they claim to behave (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2010, 212). Observation has been argued to be a way to study the real world; it enables one to see how things function in their natural settings. Critics say the observer can both change the behaviour of the ones' observed and himself grow emotionally attached to the target group. It is argued that the objectivity during observation is easily lost, but also that it allows a close look to the business observed. Either way, observation allows an opportunity to gather interesting and versatile data. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2010, 213, 214.)

In participative observation the researcher joins the organisation that is being researched. This allows a holistic view of the business observed as well as a chance to develop a connection with the business being researched while constantly using conversation as a tool to understand better the functions of the business. This helps with understanding the organisation in a throughout way, but can cause problems with how the researcher views matters. While observing it is important for the researcher to keep his own opinions and feelings separated

from the observation, in order to get valid research data. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2010, 104, 105.)

3.1 Insights to ideas

Benchmarking and observation as tools give an insight to the internal processes of a business. To get an idea of to whom the communication is, what processes the communication has and how it can be used customer journey, personas and brainstorming were taken into use. Albert Einstein said “you can’t solve a problem with the same thinking that created it”, this could be said to be one of the main thoughts behind service design thinking. A user-centred service can be created only by viewing processes from the user’s viewpoint. Both customer journey and personas are well known methods in service design, and have been adapted to the development of the communications plan to Brazilian Experience.

Customer journey is a tool that represents the journey a customer makes while using a service. The customer journey is a visual tool, through which the different touchpoints between the customer and the service provider are illustrated. The key factor when creating a customer journey is to be able to observe the journey from the customer’s point of view. This way a valid customer journey can be created that shows all the touchpoints a customer has starting from the need for the service to post-service. The touchpoints are not necessarily linked to the service provider, since they express the customer’s journey they can be anything the customer faces throughout the service experience. (Service-Design Tools 2009.)

The customer journey is a visualized map of all the steps a customer takes while interacting with a service provider, and can also include the emotional storyline to give an insight to the level of the service. The customer journey should clearly show how a specific service is tied to a customer’s daily life, and what activities and goals lie between the choices the customer makes. The customer journey does not only function as a storyline for the customer’s actions, but helps to pinpoint possible problems on the service provider’s side. (Customer Experience Matters 2013.) The customer journey could be said to be the manuscript of a service, which shows intentional, unintentional, expected and unexpected moments during the service experience and well done is a help when developing a service to the better (Engne 2013).

While the customer journey showcases processes of the service, personas focuses on who the users of the service are. Personas as a tool allows a researcher to get to know the customer and answers questions such as who, what and why. The initial focus is on the customer’s motivations and intentions, but also gives insight to behaviour, beliefs and intentions. Personas helps the researcher to realize the needs and wants of a customer and hence to gain new insights about the service provided. (Tamm 2013, 2-3.)

The personas does not aim to describe every possible customer, but focuses on a targeted clientele that is easily grasped. Generally a persona should contain biographical information, skill levels, habits, tasks, environmental factors and goals. The persona is then used to analyse how different personas approach a service. Personas also helps to think of actions that satisfy the customer's needs and goals, and gives insight into what can motivate him to action. (Tamm 2013, 2, 4, 7.)

Steps of communication in an organisation are simple, but the actual information and functions in the plan can be more difficult to define. A communications plan is always a reflection of the community it is used in; it is based on the activity, messages and images and framed by strategic messages and values. (Åberg 2000, 228.) The plan's purpose is to inform, persuade and activate employees (Deveraux Ferguson 1999, 37), which is why the communications plan for Brazilian Experience was done with the help of the staff members. Tools used when working with the staff members were customer journey, personas and brainstorming. This gave a chance to understand what the staff needed, and also to help them understand the organisational functions from a different point of view, and commit to the communication on a different level.

The analysis of the current state of the communication functions as a ground for an optimized communications plan. An optimized plan is simple, understandable, easily used and available for all the staff. A good plan is done with care and a lot of thought, and should be aligned with the organisational goals in order to reach optimized results. This requires constant communication with staff members, understanding of what is wanted and what is needed, and ability to take a step out of old behavioural models. (Korhonen & Rajala 2011, 98-99.)

The plan should be tested time and time again within the organisation, to see what parts work, which does not and how the staff can work with the stated guidelines (Korhonen & Rajala 2011, 100,102). As the old saying goes, there is always room for improvement, and no plan is set in stone; communication is an ever changing, fast flowing aspect in our daily lives. Isohookana (2007, 92) even states a company's success is dependent on how well it can react to the constant changes in its surroundings, which means when some part of the plan is not functioning as it is supposed to, it should immediately be altered for the better. Communication is linked to momentary factors, and the plan should be able to react to these factors whenever needed (Åberg 2000, 227).

A good plan is useless, if it is not properly used. For the plan to be of any use in an organisation it needs to be properly initialized; staff and management should be properly informed about the plan, explained why it has been made, and why it is important for them to act upon

the plan. Duties, roles and reasons behind the changes should be explained, all questions answered and suggestions taken into consideration. A well done initialization commits the staff to the plan and helps them in their everyday work. (Korhonen & Rajala 2011, 100,102.)

3.2 Assessing communication

Even the most well thought out plan is invalid, if it cannot be indicated what the results are. In order to assess the communication there needs to be taken a look to the beginning; the communication was planned based on the organisational goals, a rough indicator of how well the communication has worked would be to look at if the set goals are achieved (Juholin 2009, 52, 105). Communication could be seen as a continuum made from basic terms in communication, goal setting and following up on results (Juholin 2009, 340), which allows a constant assessment between the organisational goals and communication and implements into an always up-to-date communication strategy (Wright 2009, 15).

Organisational goals can take years to achieve, which is why other measuring techniques should be applied to assess communication. For information to be useful it is important to know what is looked for (Wright 2009, 8). A good assessment gives results that are useful, needed, and helps develop the communication even further. In this thesis time was an issue, and only short-term affects have been able to be assessed seen so far. Immediate results were found out through self-evaluation. Through self-evaluation an organisation can constantly learn, develop and improve. It requires a specific knowledge of how daily tasks are performed and what effect they have in the organisation. Conversation and questions among the staff members give some depth to the evaluation, and helps to get a more valid assessment. (Juholin 2009, 346-356.)

An efficient assessment is a mix of several components, questions the influence communication has on organisational goals, and shows what kind of development is needed in the future (Juholin 2009, 345). The most important thing when assessing communication is to find the methods that give the answers and information that is needed for development (Wright 2009, 9). Even the best results are useless unless they are acted up on. Brainstorming sessions can help to go through the results and to give ideas to how to use the gathered information. Reacting to changes and results, means making an effort for improvement, improvement opens a path to get closer to the visions and goals an organisation has (Juholin 2009, 365).

4 Developing a communications plan for Brazilian Experience

The development process was done for Brazilian Experience in order to achieve ways to attract more customers in an efficient way. As an outcome of the process a communications

plan (Appendix 1) was made for the company. The plan was made in a constant communication with the staff, mostly with the owner Rafaela Rolim, in order to get a coherent and accurate plan that would be usable for the company. The purpose of the communication plan was to in an overall way develop the communication processes in the organisation, while enforcing new processes that will benefit the company in its growth.

The plan has several focus points depending on the wanted outcome. External communication has been paid special attention to, with a focus on digital communication, since this is the most common way of Brazilian Experience to reach out to its clientele and stakeholders due to the geographic location of the business and its international target group. For the communications plan to be as useful as possible it was made together with the staff, with the use of methods such as conversation, observation and mind storming sessions.

The plan was made within a three month internship at Brazilian Experience. Tasks during the internship focused mainly on research, benchmarking and content writing. Through the tasks it was possible to get an excellent viewpoint to the business and its functions, which worked as a basis for the development of the communications plan. Rolim was very supportive throughout the process and gave free hands in the development process, which gave a unique chance to create a plan from a different angle; as an intern, customer and colleague. The position at the office also allowed free and unofficial discussion with other interns about their experiences, which gave insight to both sides of the business, and enabled to create a communications plan that supports the organisational goals in a customer centric way.

4.1 Preparation and planning

Preparation for the development of the communications plan started a month before the actual internship in Brazil. During this time there was a constant discussion with the management of Brazilian Experience through e-mail, which allowed a basic idea of what was hope to be achieved through the development process, and what the outcome of the thesis was expected to be. The month pre-arrival to Brazil, research focused on international and multicultural management, communication, and different organisations in the field. The main products of Brazilian Experience, volunteering and service learning, were familiarized with. Also well-known brands in the same area of business were followed on different social medias, in order to get a clear picture of the travel industry today. The preparations gave insight to the cultural change that would be experienced, both on a personal and organisational level, and gave insight into the travel business and its current trends.

Different theoretical aspects were greatly focused on; publications on communication, marketing, international and multicultural management, volunteering and service learning were

studied. With a background in service design, a user centred approach was decided to be taken, which meant understanding the travel industry both from the organisation's and customer's points of views. A preliminary topic analysis was written, and functioned as a guideline throughout the development process.

Through conversation with the management, research of Brazilian Experience, following the company on different social media channels, and familiarizing with the website it was possible to create an image of the company as a potential customer. This was useful later on while creating the communications plan, and got an in-depth view to it when discussing with interns in Brazil. Preparations made pre-arrival to Brazil are not things directly visible in this thesis, but are things that functioned as inspiration, gave a chance to view issues from different aspects, and prepared for the process on a more professional level. Understanding international business, multicultural work environments, marketing and communications, and an in-depth knowledge of the travel industry enabled a focused way of working. It also enabled a creative way of working on the subject, and to constantly create and recreate ideas until they suited the philosophy of Brazilian Experience.

4.2 Creating the communications plan

The creation of the communications plan started with assessing the current state of communication Brazilian Experience had. The methods used for this was observation, discussion with staff and clients and familiarisation with the different media channels the organisation uses. The external communication was observed through experiences as a client and by discussing with other interns. There was also some emphasis on observing how the communication with stakeholders worked.

Turned out the current communication was very arbitrary in its manner and lacked a clear focus point. Customer service was very personal and supportive, but lacked clarity on the inside and had some major issues when it came to sharing information for incoming interns. Due to changes in staff some processes had ceased altogether and the manner of updates in the social media depended a lot on the staff responsible of it. A clear, general communication style that would have been acknowledged by all the staff was non-existent and everything in the office went through the management, which affected the timetable of everyone in the office.

The office shared an open air, which meant everything could be freely asked and suggested and was always taken into consideration. This also made the work environment pleasant and easy, and the staff a team instead of individuals working in the same space. Unusual for the Latin American culture, there was a small gap between management and employees, and Ro-

lim made a point of often reminding how important constructive criticism is, how finding your own personal efficient way of working is important, and how a supportive working environment benefits everyone in the office. This made everyone's work easier, even though the certain lacks in the general communication.

The warm air of the office also spread to the incoming customers, but was more visible to the short term groups than the individual interns in Brazil. During the time developing the communication in Brazil, Brazilian Experience had major staff changes, which of course had its impact on the performance of the work and its strain on basic actions. It also showed how unplanned the communication was, how clear guidelines for staff did not exist and how the management had high expectations for new staff without a proper vision or tangible goals for them to follow.

Through conversation with interns, and experiences as a customer for Brazilian Experience, it was found out the customers shared a general opinion of the service provided not meeting the payment that had been made for the company. This resulted in some issues, a certain lack of trust on the customers' behalf and a defending front from Brazilian Experience, which unfortunately did not manage to win the trust of the interns back. The problems were however dealt with quickly as soon as they were acknowledged, and the next round of interns had a more pleasant experience of the company.

The main problem with the communication at Brazilian Experience was the lack of it; obvious things were not said out loud, changes were informed of late or not at all and the communication with stakeholders and customers lacked clarity. The multicultural field Brazilian Experience works at had its effect on the day-to-day communication; even though the management had knowledge of cultural differences and enhanced the ability to adapt, they lacked themselves the ability to understand some cultural issues. Cultural sensitivity, the willingness to understand and be aware of other cultures (Deresky, 2011), was a major factor throughout the internship.

Positive things in the communication was the openness of it, the warmth of the staff and the true concern for the customers. Short term groups were paid special attention to, and was found easier to manage by the company, which resulted to the groups having extraordinary good experiences and a more positive image of the company and its personnel than the individual customers. As said previously there is no company without people, and this is especially true in the case of Brazilian Experience.

4.3 Determination of organisational goals

The organisational goals were determined after assessing the communication. Understanding the vision the management had for the company was important, in order to align the goals of communication with the organisational goals. The management has a clear image of wanting to grow the business, with both an increase of individual customers and groups. During the time of the development process a new website was designed for Brazilian Experience, and would serve as a channel for individual customers to sign up for programs, and as an information channel for the customers of the company, its programs, and Brazil in general.

The determination of goals was done by discussing with the management and the staff, an effective plan is made with all the staff of a company (Blythe 2006, 51). Emphasis during the process was laid on not only finding out the organisational goals, but in finding out how the staff wishes to achieve these goals. This would allow a better chance in creating a communications plan that would be useful on the most basic level of actions in the company. During conversation about the goals and planning ways for the company to reach them, also issues that had come up were discussed. Ways for altering processes were thought of in order to avoid similar issues in the future.

Explaining the Finnish culture turned out to be very difficult, no matter how much one prepares for a new culture and a multicultural environment, one still sees things from their point of view. Stepping out and trying to see the Finnish culture clearly and objectively, was as difficult as it was for the Brazilians to see their own culture. One's own perception is usually confirmed through searching for stereotypes, which might be correct, but often the analysis of behavioural models is wrong (Nieminen 2014, 79). Through constant communication, pondering, conversations and explaining the main things that were causing problems, not only between Finns and Brazilians, but between different cultures in general, it was possible to lay out the main things that was causing problems and could cause problems in the future.

Going through the cultural differences was very important for defining the organisational goals, especially for developing the communications plan. It helped with clearing out what would be best for Brazilian Experience in its current stage, what things to focus more on, which problems to solve first and how to go on after that. A general base was always to regard incoming students as individuals, to always ask what they are looking for, instead of giving them a concept and believing that is good service. Also to remember the differences, and in a polite manner also remind incoming students of the cultural differences would serve everyone in a positive way. By acknowledging differences it is easier to work towards a common goal (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, 102), which in the case of Brazilian Experience is to provide an excellent experience.

The organisational goals were determined as a desire to grow through a bigger customer flow. The emphasis would be put on groups, since they are something the personnel both enjoys more to work with, and find easier to manage. The philosophy of Brazilian Experience should be seen in all of its actions, and the company aims to offer a better understanding of cultural differences and a chance for personal growth and development. Being open and caring for the world around you is one of Brazilian Experience's main values, and it hopes to bring this forward in all of its actions. From the staff Brazilian Experience expects commitment, love to the work they do and to excel in expectations. Inspiring and finding inspiration in each other is something that makes the office unique, and this is enhanced everyday by the management.

4.4 Organisational goals to the communications plan

The actual communications plan was made with a constant support from the Brazilian Experience's staff. Important was not to create the perfect plan, but a plan that would be useful for Brazilian Experience, and have a positive impact on the customer experience. The tools used in the creation of the plan ranged from chit chat with interns to endless benchmarking and scrolling through Instagram, Facebook and different university web pages. Through discussions with the staff of Brazilian Experience it was possible to find out what they wished to achieve. What was unclear, was what the potential customer expects from the company, which is of great importance when planning communication (Deresky 2011, 155). With service design being a tool, it was important to make a plan that does not only benefit the organisation, but thrives to reach the organisational goals with the customer as a centre.

Other travel agencies were researched, in order to get a view of what tools they used and how. Blogs from travellers and interns were read, in order to realize what problems they face during their experiences, what they enjoy the most, and what they wish to experience. This gave an overall picture of what the target group wishes from a travel agency (Altstiel 2006, 26), and enabled to create a plan that would align both with the organisational goals and the customer expectations.

The communications plan was from the very early stages viewed by the management, in order to ensure that the plan would suit Brazilian Experience as well as possible. The staff were a great help throughout the development process; sharing ideas, experiences, and wishes allowed the cherries on top to be picked for the communications plan. The three month internship, with a changing staff, was very rewarding in all of its changes and challenges. The tasks at the office focused mainly on developing processes ranging from content writing, researching possible new clients and suggestions to improve everyday actions at the office.

At the end of the internship all the staff was gathered in a group, and the latest version of the communication plan was gone through. The discussion with the staff and brainstorming session, worked as the final base for the development of the communications plan. The staff and the interns of Brazilian Experience were a constant inspiration throughout the development process, and allowed the development of a plan that best suited Brazilian Experience. The end result was to become a participative plan, with an authentic approach (Meerman Scott, 2009, 25). The main focus in the plan is on social media marketing and its strategies, special attention was given to stakeholder management, which will be important in order to reach the desired goals of Brazilian Experience. The plan is made in a way that allows the personnel to work in their own way, while still following a general strategy. There is room for the personnel to put in their own personal style in what they do, and this way carry on the warm and welcoming air the office has.

The communications plan (Attachment 1) starts with outlining the organisational goals of Brazilian Experience, and through this lays out the goals of communication. It continues to explain the importance of internal communication and its effects, while outlining responsibilities for the staff in communication. Target audiences and ways to reach them are presented in detail, as is the thought behind the processes - the idea was to answer questions of why the plan is made in a certain way, already in the plan, in the hope of engaging the staff reading it in a more throughout way. Goals and tools get the main focus in the plan; for every channel there is outlined the target group, what action through the channel can be made and tools for assessment are also given. In order to make the communication as goal oriented as possible, also reasons behind chosen channels and their functions are explained in the plan. For example, LinkedIn, was found as a primary channel for contacting possible stakeholders.

Engaging customers and possible customers in the social media is very important, which is why the communications plan (Attachment 1) clearly outlines different tools for engagement, and gives practical examples for engagement in different channels. The idea is to through engaging customers in the social media to strengthen the brand image, and to give the social media users a chance to be a part of the Brazilian Experience's social media world. This will hopefully attract new customers, and help keep in contact with current ones. For analysing the impact of the communication, a clear image of how to analyse the communication was also shown in the plan. A schedule and a year plan was made to keep track of responsibilities, and to make the communication strategy even clearer and as goal oriented as possible.

Both the management and one of the staff members evaluated the use of the communications plan. It was asked them what worked, what did not, and what help the plan gave them in their work. One of the staff members pointed out that the plan helped in the daily customer care, and that some of the development suggestions were already in use. The management

evaluated the work as very good, and the plan to be a great base for Brazilian Experience to get their marketing more focused. A challenge both while making the communications plan and in implementing it, is that Brazilian Experience lacks a proper marketing department. This is though a working progress, and with time the management hopes they can fully use the communications plan in their actions. Most of all the management thinks the plan has worked as new insights on how to promote services and make them more tangible for the clientele. The management is happy about how the communications plan helped improve the quality of their service and the support they provide.

5 Conclusion

Designing a communications plan with a tight schedule, for a small company is no easy task, especially with the fast phased communication in today's world. The main purpose with the plan for Brazilian Experience was to connect the company with the right people, with the purpose of a growing number of customers. To get a better understanding of the varied social media channels that exist today, required constant research; actually seeing, using, following and evaluating what functions and what does not.

Connecting is easier than ever before, hence the planning of the communication requires some seriously thought-out goalsetting. With, Deveraux Ferguson's (1999) ideas of making a communications plan with the user in mind and Isohookana's (2007) arguments of the constant communication around us in mind, a certain idea of what kind of a plan would be needed started to set out. With service design in the backbone, the idea just grew stronger; a plan that would best benefit the company it was made for. The actual process of making a communications plan greatly leaned on Juholin's (2009) and Åberg's (2000) thoughts about how a communication plan is supposed to look like. Korhonen and Rajala (2011) were a huge help when it came to making a plan, which would actually be useful in all its different levels.

With communication being such a varying component and the aim being the ability to connect with the right people through the right channels, a look on the inside was necessary. What was it exactly that Brazilian Experience wished to achieve? What means do they have to achieve these goals? How to motivate the staff to work in a flexible way that supports these goals? Not easy questions to answer, but had to be answered in order to achieve a plan that would be most useful. This required a dive into the world of Brazilian Experience, a constant critical eye and compassion to deal with the cultural differences that popped up at the most unexpected turns. With the use of methods such as conversation, observation and benchmarking many unspoken things were found out; things that are so normal and close to the staff that they do not realize to mention them.

The staff being open, interested and excited about the ideas bouncing around, it was fairly easy to get a hold of what was needed. The downside was that the staff changed constantly, and during the time spent in Brazil, there never was a marketing nor communications person, this meant the marketing and communication were not functioning as supposed to. This was seen as a positive thing, it gave the opportunity to start from the beginning; to write a plan that would be easy to implement and would guide the future marketing and communications staff in their job.

When there was a solid idea of what the company needed, it was time to look at what the potential customers wanted. Balancing these two sides became a corner stone of the plan; to create efficient communication that helps the staff in their everyday work, while functioning as an attractive and wanted company for customers. Endless benchmarking, conversation with other interns and a countless number of travelling blogs gave an idea of what customers today wish from a travel agency.

Mixing the factors turned out to a communications plan, a plan that has enough air to be flexible, allows changes, but reminds of the targets Brazilian Experience has. The plan is down-to-earth; gives real life examples, is made to help out when there is a creative block. Because, that is what was needed; a change from the old, with an understanding of the organisational culture and the needs of the customers. A plan that would support, drive forward and make it easy to assess progress.

Progress happens slowly, and when the idea is to build long-lasting results, quick changes are not possible. The staff and management being content with the results of the plan, are the best assessment so far. Them being happy with what was created, means they will also work towards the goals set in the plan. This means everyday functions will be handled in a more efficient way, a stronger brand image, and loyal customers.

References

- Altstiel, T. & Grow, J. 2006. Advertising Strategy: Creative Tactics From the Outside/In. California: SAGE Publications.
- Bernoff, J. & Li, C. 2008. Verkkovalta: Voittaminen Sosiaalisten Teknologioden Maailmassa. Helsinki: Tietosanoma.
- Blythe, J. 2006. Essentials of Marketing Communications. 3rd edition. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Cornelissen, J. 2011. Corporate Communication: A guide to Theory and Practice. 3rd edition. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Deresky, H. 2011. International Management: Managing Across Borders and Cultures. 7th edition. New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- Devereaux Ferguson, S. 1999. Communication Planning. An Integrated Approach. USA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Dowling, P. & Welch, D. & Schuler, R. 1999. International Human Resource Management: Managing people in a multinational context. 3rd edition. Mason: South-Western College Publishing.
- Eskola, A. & Kurki, L. 2001. Vapaaehtoistyö auttamisena ja oppimisena. Jyväskylä: Gummerus.
- Evans, D. 2008. Social Media Marketing: An Hour a Day. Indianapolis: Wiley Publishing.
- Grönroos, C. 2009. Palvelujen johtaminen ja markkinointi. 4th edition. Juva: WS Bookwell.
- Hall, E.T. 1960. The Silent Language in Overseas Business. Harvard Business Review May-June.
- Hellman, K. & Peuhkurinen, E. & Raulas, M. 2005. Asiakasjohtamisen työkirja. Juva: WS Bookwell.
- Hofstede, G. & Hofstede, G.J. 2005. Cultures and Organizations: software of the mind. 2nd edition. USA: McGraw-Hill.
- Isohookana, H. 2007. Yrityksen markkinointiviestintä. Juva: WS Bookwell.
- Juholin, E. 2009. Communicare! Viestintä strategiasta käytäntöön. 5th edition. Porvoo: WS Bookwell.
- Kantor, I. 2007. Median ja yrityksen vuoropuhelu. Helsinki: Talentum.
- Keyton, J. 2011. Communication & Organizational Culture. 2nd ed. California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Korhonen, N. & Rajala, R. 2011. Viestinnän prosessointi. Hämeenlinna: Karisto.
- Korkman, A. & Arantola, H. 2009. ARKI: Eväitä uuteen asiakaslähtöisyyteen. Juva: WS Bookwell.

Lonely Planet 2015. Volunteer: A Traveller's Guide to Making a Difference Around the World. Australia/USA/UK: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd.

Meerman Scott, D. 2009. The New Rules of Marketing & PR. 2nd edition. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

Miettinen, S. 2011. Palvelumuotoilu - uusia menetelmiä käyttäjätiedon hankintaan ja hyödyntämiseen. 2nd edition. Helsinki: Teknologiainfo Teknova.

Newell Brown, J. & Swain, A. 2012. The professional recruiter's handbook. 2nd edition. London: Kogan Page Limited.

Nieminen, M. 2014. Monikulttuurinen asiakastyö. Helsinki: Tietosanoma.

Pont, S. 2013. Digital State. London: Kogan Page Limited.

Scoble, R. & Israel, S. 2006. Blogit ja bisnes: Yritys 2.0. Helsinki: Basam Books.

Smith, L. 2008. Effective Internal Communication. 2nd ed. London: Kogan Page.

Storbacka, K. & Lehtinen, J. 2005. Asiakkuuden Ehdoilla Vai Asiakkuuden Armoilla. 6th edition. Juva: WS Bookwell.

Svendsen, A. 1998. The Stakeholder Strategy. San Francisco: Berret-Koehler Publishers.

Tamm, M. 2013. Personas. Powerful tool in design process. The Estonian Information Technology College.

Wright, M. 2009. Gower Handbook of Internal Communication. Surrey: Gower Publishing Limited.

Åberg, L. 2000. Viestinnän johtaminen. Keuruu: Otava.

Electronic references

Bandy, J. What is Service Learning or Community Engagement? Referenced to 24 January 2015. <http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-through-community-engagement/#what>

Brazilian Experience. Referenced to 14 January 2015. <http://brazilianexperience.com.br/>

Criteo 2015. Blog. Navigating the travel industry; what brands need to do to succeed in today's highly competitive marketplace. Referenced to 12 June 2015. <http://www.criteo.com/blog/2015/03/navigating-the-travel-industry-what-brands-need-to-do-to-succeed-in-today-s-highly-competitive-marketplace/>

Customer Experience Matters 2013. Seven Steps for Developing Customer Journey Maps. Referenced to 8 July 2015. <http://experiencematters.wordpress.com/2013/04/03/seven-steps-for-developing-customer-journey-maps/>

Engine 2013. Services. Referenced to 8 July 2015. <http://enginegroup.co.uk/services/>

Environmental Protection Agency 2011. Service Learning - Learning by Doing: Students Take Greening to the Community. Referenced to 24 January 2015.
<http://www.epa.gov/osw/education/pdfs/svcllearn.pdf>

Kaila, K. 2014. Opas toiminnan kehittäjälle: Onnistunut vapaaehtoistoiminta. 3rd edition. Sähköinen Painos. Referenced to 20 January 2015.
http://www.kierratyskeskus.fi/files/8928/Onnistunut_vapaaehtoistoiminta_opas_VETY_0514_web.pdf

Kankiewicz, K. 2015. Teaching Guide: Using Service Learning in Writing Courses. Referenced to 24 January 2015.
http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/service_learning/index.cfm

Konwledgeworkz. Inter-cultural Intelligence. Referenced to 8 July 2015.
<http://www.knowledgeworkx.com/who-we-are/our-focus/inter-cultural-intelligence>

Service Design Tools 2009. Customer Journey Map. Referenced to 8 July 2015.
<http://www.servicedesigntools.org/tools/8>

Witulski, F. 2010. Values of Intercultural Intelligence. TedxTalks.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVCxPKCwImE>

Appendices

Appendix 1: Communications Plan: Brazilian Experience..... 27

Appendix 1: Communications Plan: Brazilian Experience

Table of contents

1 Communication plan for Brazilian Experience

2 Internal communication

3 Audiences

3.1 Customers

3.2 Customer journey and personas

4 Goals & Tools

5 Channels

5.1 Website

Target group

Action

Assessment

5.2 Blog

Target group

Action

Assessment

5.3 Facebook

Target Group

Action

Assessment

5.4 Instagram

Target Group

Action

Assessment

5.5 YouTube

Target Group

Action

Assessment

5.6 LinkedIn

Target Group

Action

Assessment

5.7 Twitter

Target group

Action

Assessment

5.8 Direct contact with universities

Action

Assessment

5.9 Promotional websites

Assessment

5.10 WhatsApp

Target group

Action

Assessment

5.11 Newsletter

Target group

Action

Assessment

6 Engagement

7 Assessment

8 Schedule

8.1 Year plan

9 Tools

10 Conclusion